Alberta Council on Admissions and Transfer (ACAT) Business Plan 2011-2014

MANDATE

Established in 1974, the Alberta Council on Admissions and Transfer serves as an advisory body through which stakeholders work cooperatively for the benefit of learners to ensure smooth secondary to post-secondary and post-secondary to post-secondary transitions and effective transferability of courses or programs within the post-secondary system.

ACAT provides leadership to Alberta's post-secondary transfer system to achieve:

- increased educational opportunities for adult learners through student transfer; and
- accurate information for learners about admission and transfer opportunities.

ACAT operates with the support of the Minister responsible for advanced education and the co-operation of Alberta's post-secondary institutions. Student transfer involves the portability of educational credit among programs. Based on successful completion of studies, students receive transfer credit, where appropriate, upon admission to an educational program in an Alberta post-secondary institution.

VISION

Alberta's post-secondary institutions work cooperatively to provide a transfer system that is responsive to the needs of learners in the matters of admissions, transfer credit, and recognition of prior learning.

MISSION

The mission of the Alberta Council on Admissions and Transfer (ACAT) is to be a catalyst for beneficial change and an advocate for learners in the areas of post-secondary admission and transfer throughout Campus Alberta.

ACAT provides leadership and direction, as a cornerstone of Campus Alberta, in the improvement of educational opportunities for Alberta students through inter-institutional transfer. ACAT is committed to supporting and improving communication among Alberta post-secondary institutions and to promoting the advantages of a system of education, with all that this means for educational planning for the benefit of learners.

OPERATING PRINCIPLES

The Council endorses the following as basic to its purpose and activities:

(a) **Support Campus Alberta's core objectives by facilitating learners to successfully navigate the Transfer System and foster lifelong learning in the advanced education system.**

(b) **Student access to higher education and the opportunity for student mobility among institutions of higher education in Alberta shall be optimized.**

(c) **Negotiation of opportunities for student mobility shall be based on the recognition that while learning experiences may differ in a variety of ways, their substance may be virtually equivalent in terms of content and rigour.**

(d) **Effective academic advising, career counseling and optimum mobility require that the student have prior knowledge of at least the minimum transfer credit which can be awarded.**

(e) **Individual institutions have the primary responsibility for instructional programs, even though responsibility for higher education is shared among various constituents. The responsibility of institutions includes program design and delivery, determination of academic prerequisites and student admission criteria, and certification of the academic achievement of students.**

(f) **Institutions have the responsibility and the prerogative to investigate the total educational background of applicants seeking admission.**

(g) **Post-secondary institutions are committed to developing and maintaining clearly stated policies and procedures for consideration of transfer credit and to applying them in a consistent manner.**

(h) **After students are granted admission to an institution under a transfer arrangement, they shall be granted the same rights and privileges as students who began their studies at the institution.**

(i) **Post-secondary institutions are committed to promoting and increasing awareness of the transfer system in an effort to proactively influence public policy.**

All institutional members of Alberta's Transfer System have endorsed Council's principles and endeavour to apply them with respect to transfer within the province, regionally and nationally.

SIGNIFICANT OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

Albertans expect a learner-centred post-secondary system that is provided through a collaborative and cooperative approach, known as Campus Alberta. ACAT and the transfer system are critical to facilitating the various components to meet the needs of Albertans wishing to pursue post-secondary studies and to realize the vision of Campus Alberta.

The following opportunities and challenges could impact ACAT's ability to achieve its goals. ACAT examines these drivers to determine the appropriate strategies and initiatives that will enhance and improve educational opportunities for learners.

Alignment with Campus Alberta

ACAT is committed to continuing to further the vision of Campus Alberta with a learner centric approach that maintains the needs of all Alberta learners in the forefront.

ACAT's membership includes all public post-secondary institutions in Alberta, as well as private institutions with approved degree programs and other private institutions, and some Aboriginal colleges. In addition, Council membership includes student and public representatives.

This broad representation, coupled with the spirit of collaboration which ACAT embodies, provides a unique opportunity to realize the Campus Alberta vision.

Changing Landscape of the Post-secondary System

As Alberta's post-secondary system evolves the mobility of its learners continues to be increasingly less linear and more fluid. This trend indicates that learners are leveraging multiple paths across the system. Student mobility in this respect is expected to expand and become increasingly varied.

This evolution, while offering learners a greater diversity of options, creates additional complexity for Alberta's Transfer System. Addressing this trend requires ACAT to develop new and innovative approaches to establishing learner pathways in order to ensure the Transfer System remains an effective and sustainable instrument for learner mobility.

Increasing Block Transfer Opportunities

Reflecting its commitment to developing and broadening learner pathways ACAT continues to explore the expansion of block transfer opportunities in Alberta.

The Block Transfer Sub-committee, building upon the results of the Environics Final Report on block transfer and career laddering, is looking to define and develop best practices and models for block transfer in Alberta.

Articulation Committees

Collaborative relationships between post-secondary institutions comprise the foundation of the Alberta Transfer System. A central mechanism used to foster the collaborative spirit within the post-secondary system is the use of Articulation Committees.

These committees bring program heads, faculty, and Alberta Education, in a given area of study, together to exchange information and discuss issues related to admissions and transfer. This builds collegial relationships between colleagues from within a discipline, leading to increased cooperation.

The ACAT Articulation Sub-committee, established in 2009, is looking to build upon the successful launches of new articulation committees in English and Aboriginal Education in 2010. The Sub-committee has identified Child and Youth Care and Business as the next program areas for expansion in 2011 with consideration being given to committees in Sociology and Psychology for 2012 and Fine Arts in 2013.

Collaborative Development of Learning Outcomes and Assessment

ACAT's work to move towards learning outcomes as a vital part of the transfer system, where the link between teaching, learning and assessment is emphasized, continues. The aim of a learning outcome system is to promote mutual trust, transparency, and recognition of competencies and qualifications to increase mobility and facilitate access to lifelong learning.

Building upon ACAT's examination of European learning outcome based frameworks, the Bologna and Copenhagen initiatives, the Learning Outcomes and Assessment Sub-committee is working to develop best practices and models for learning outcomes and assessment. It is recognized that this work, which will be developed collaboratively with post-secondary institutions, is an evolutionary change and will be realized over time.

Provision of Effective Student Advising

There is a continuing challenge to provide effective program advising information to prospective students regarding admission requirements, transfer credits, and the potential for PLAR assessment. Learners applying for admission to an institution require access to timely and accurate information about the options that may be available to them in the program of study in which they are interested. Learners are also becoming more technologically advanced and are processing information in a different way. It is important that marketing materials and information targeting learners are designed and modernized in order to meet their needs.

PRIORITY INITIATIVES 2011-2014

ACAT has identified strategic priorities to respond to the significant opportunities and challenges influencing its ability to achieve its goals and strategies for 2011-2014. Through its review of internal and external challenges, the strategic priorities described below have been identified and will be worked on concurrently. These are in addition to the important ongoing core businesses of ACAT.

Best Practices and Research

ACAT will continue to enhance its profile to reflect its role as a representative voice in policy development for the advanced education system on items related to admissions and transfer.

Work will continue to enhance best practices on admissions and transfer that facilitate and support learner mobility. This work will include:

Articulation Committees: ACAT will continue to expand the number of articulation committees in the Transfer System and leverage these committees to assist in advancing initiatives. Support and assistance from institution faculty on a variety of fronts will allow institutions to assist in guiding the direction and ensuring the quality of Alberta's Transfer System.

Block Transfer: ACAT will continue to develop best practices and models for the expansion of block transfer in the Transfer System.

Learning Outcomes and Assessment: ACAT will continue to work to move towards learning outcomes through the development of best practices and models for an outcome measured Transfer System.

National Leadership

As a leader in admissions and transfer, ACAT will continue to promote the excellence of Alberta's Transfer System, recognize the mobility of students, and continue to work with other jurisdictions in Canada through participation in bodies such as the Western Consortium on Admissions and Transfer (WestCAT) and the Pan-Canadian Consortium on Admissions and Transfer (PCCAT).

Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR)

The implementation of the *PLAR Action Plan* continues to be a ministerial priority, and will continue through to March 2013, and possibly beyond that date.

CORE BUSINESSES, GOALS, AND STRATEGIES

ACAT has identified four goals with strategies that describe the actions that will be taken to achieve its goals.

Core Business One:

ADMISSION

Admission practices and policies at post-secondary institutions are clearly articulated.

GOAL 1

Facilitate the development, maintenance and communication of fair and equitable admission practices and policies at post-secondary institutions.

Strategies

- Promote smooth transitions as students move from high school to post-secondary programs and from one post-secondary program to another.
- Promote increased access to clear information on admission practices at post-secondary institutions.
- Encourage post-secondary institutions to clearly communicate their admission practices.
- Encourage post-secondary institutions to develop, where possible, common terminology.
- Work with Alberta Education to ensure that new high school curriculum information is available to learners.

Core Business Two:

TRANSFER

Facilitate agreements among post-secondary institutions to acknowledge and recognize appropriate previous learning experience.

GOAL 2

Learners receive appropriate educational credit as they transfer from one Alberta program to another.

Strategies

- Develop and enhance system-wide principles, policies, and procedures to continuously improve the student transfer system.
- Monitor the effectiveness of the transfer system.
- Ensure the continuing accuracy of transfer agreements.
- Continue the implementation of Alberta Advanced Education and Technology's *PLAR Action Plan*.

Core Business Three:

COMMUNICATION

Ensure that learners and other stakeholders have timely and accurate information about institutions' admission requirements and course and program transfer options.

GOAL 3

Learners have access to current, accurate information on admissions and transfer policies as well as course and program transfer opportunities and are aware of the benefits of the admission and transfer system.

Strategies

- Provide information to support admission of high school students, students transferring between Alberta institutions and from other jurisdictions so they can make informed decisions as they plan their studies.
- Educate students and other stakeholders about the benefits of the Alberta Transfer System.

Core Business Four:

INFLUENCE

Influence policies related to admission and transfer issues, and provide a forum for inter-institutional and cross-jurisdictional discussion of admissions and transfer issues.

GOAL 4

ACAT is the cornerstone of Campus Alberta and is the recognized leader on issues related to the admissions and transfer system in Alberta, while serving as a model for other jurisdictions.

Strategies

- Position ACAT to be a leader in furthering the Campus Alberta vision.
- Conduct research and provide policy advice to Advanced Education and Technology and the advanced education system on items related to admissions and transfer.
- Provide a forum for open and informed inter-institutional discussion of admissions and transfer issues.
- Advocate for the provincial transfer system nationally and work to enhance national/provincial connections.